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The Green Bough



Austin

BY THE SAME AUTHOR



A WOMAN OF GENIUS
CHRIST IN ITALY
THE ARROW MAKER

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John and Peter on the way to the sepulchre



The Green Bough

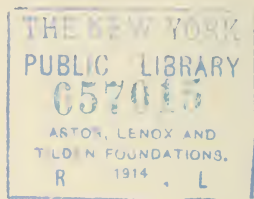
A Tale of the Resurrection
by Mary Austin



Decorations by Frank Bittner

Garden City, New York
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Credo

I believe that the ills of this world are remediable while we are in the world by no other means than the spirit of truth and brotherliness working their lawful occasions among men. I believe in Here and Now.

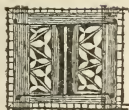
I believe in Man and the Friend of the Soul of Man, and I am unconvinced of Death.

—MARY AUSTIN

The Green Bough



The Green Bough



T was the season of the green bough. On into the night, emanations from the warm, odorous earth kept the chill from the air, and the sky, steeped in the full spring suns, retained, almost until dawn, light enough to show the pale undersides of the olive branches where they stirred with the midnight currents. It was not until the hours fell into the very pit of the night that the morning coolness began to strike shivers along the bodies of those whose business kept them sleeping on the open slopes outside the city walls.

It would have been about that time



that he awoke. For more than an hour past he had swung from point to point of consciousness on successive waves of pain; now he was carried almost to the verge of recovery, and now he felt the dragging clutch of the Pit from which hardly he had escaped. By degrees as he was borne toward life his passages in and out of insensibility began to approach more nearly the normal phases of waking and sleeping; the pangs of his body separated from the obsessions of spiritual distress, and recurrent memory began to ply.

It began with the agony in the garden and the falling away of all human support from that inexplicable wrestling of great souls with foreknowledge, which must



always seem to the generality, unnecessary if not a little absurd. More pitiably than all that had rolled between, he felt the empty reach of his affections toward the uncomprehending sleep of his companions. . . . Could ye not watch one little hour! He remembered the futility of trial, the scoffing and the betrayals, through the crisis of which his quick spirit had lived so long before, that at last it broke upon him harmlessly. Pain by pain, his body picked out for him other memories of the way, the cross, the tearing nails. . . . more than all else the impotence of purely human impulses under the larger vision which kept him even in the midst of anguish, profoundly aware of how little they knew



the thing they did. It came back upon him as the stiffness of his wounds, the burden of understanding that loses even the poor human relief of bitterness and blame. As he fell away again into the trough of bodily pain it was to measure the full horror of that drop, which, when the racked consciousness that had sustained him in the knowledge of Fatherliness, had failed like a splitten sail and left him beating blindly in the void. "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" He came strangely up to life in the anguish of that cry. . . . Suddenly he put up his hand and touched the cold stones of his sepulchre. He was dead then, and was alive. Lying very still for pure weakness, his spirit returned



half unwittingly by the old track and
and travelled toward God . . . fumblingly, as a drowsy child at the breast, he
sucked comfort, the ineffable, divine support. It flowed. Slowly the slacked
spirit filled. . . . Power came upon him. God was not dead . . . nor
forsaking. . . . He hung upon that and waited for a word. Outside in the
dawn dusk a bird, awakened by the swaying of his bough in the first waft of the
morning, bubbled over with the joyous urge of the spring. The sound of it
filtered through the rock crevices in a thin, clear trickle of song. He laid off
the grave cloth and began to feel for the round stone which he knew should close
the mouth of the grave. Wounded as he



was, it was still no more than many suffer in battle, with the cheerful promise of recovery; calling on those reserves of power for which he had always been remarkable, he applied his shoulder to the stone . . . it yielded to the pressure and slid along the groove.

He made out the soft bulk of the olive trees, all awake and astir to catch the first streak of the morning, and the *tink tink* of water falling from a pipe into a stone basin. Following it he came to the fountain from which the garden was watered, and drank and bathed his wounds. He was startled for a moment by the swaying of a garment against him, and then he perceived it to be the gardener's cloak left hanging in the tree, the



long, brown hooded garment of the time. He drew its folds around him as a protection against the warning chill of dawn. He was a workingman also, and knew the ways of working folk; he groped in the split hollow of the ancient olive tree, and far under the roots behind the gardener's spade he found a lump of figs tied in a cloth and a common flask which had yet a few swallows of wine in it. When he had eaten and drunk he bound up his side with the cloth and sat down on the stone bench of the fountain to think what had befallen him.

He was dead — else why had they buried him? — and he was alive again. This then was the meaning of those glimmers and intimations of a life so abundant



that he could not imagine even the shock of death to separate him from it. . . . For a long time he had known what he must face if he came up to Jerusalem, yet he had faced it, urged by that inward impulse too deep and imperative for human withstanding . . . and he had died . . . witness the aching wound in his side . . . and now he walked among the olives. Vestiges and starts of the broken images of pain and returning consciousness advised where he had been. He turned his mind deliberately away from that and laid hold on God . . . he was alive again. . . . The currents of the Eternal Being circulated through him with peace and healing.



The dusk of the dawn cleared to ineffable blueness, in which the domes and towers of Jerusalem swam, islanded in light. Round about, single high peaks, which still retained the winter whiteness, glowed like outposts of the heavenly host. The gates of the city clattered to let in the hordes of market gardeners with their donkeys, camped since the night before outside the walls, and presently in the cool dimness he saw the women stealing out by a postern and beginning to climb the hill path toward the place of sepulchres. They came peering through the dawn, for they were not certain of any mark by which they should know it, except that it was a new tomb wherein never man was laid. Their voices came up to him



clearly through the morning stillness, and he knew at once what their errand was when he heard them troubling lest they had come so early there would be no one about to take away the stone from the door; but when they came to the place where it should be, and saw that it was already rolled away, they were amazed and a little afraid. Then Mary the mother of James and Salome, and the other Mary, put down the spices they had brought, to go and carry word to the disciples; but Mary Magdalene stayed weeping by the sepulchre.

When he saw that she was alone he went to her and inquired why she wept. She, supposing him to be the gardener, for she saw little because of her weeping,

and it was not yet full light — “Oh, sir,” she said, “if you have borne him hence, tell me where you have laid him that I may take him away.”

“Mary!” he said, and as he spoke he put back the gardener’s hood from his head.

“Rabboni,” the old title came back half consciously in answer to the tone, and suddenly she saw that it was he, and fell in trembling, for she could not understand but that he was a spirit. She sunk in the wet grass of the orchard, for the quaking of her limbs would not sustain her.

“Why seek ye the living among the dead?” he questioned with the old tender irony, but she scarcely heard him. She



worked toward him on her knees; tremblingly her hands went out to touch the beloved feet, half to prove it were his very self or a vision of thin air.

“Nay, touch me not, Mary.” He drew back with the sensitiveness of the newly wounded. “I am not yet ascended to my Father,” he assured her as he raised her from the ground.

Louder now they heard the stir of Jerusalem awake, and knew that the broadening day might soon bring the rabble about them. When he had questioned her a little hurriedly concerning the state of the city and his disciples, he bade her tell them to come to him in Galilee in a place known to them of old, and so saying drew the folds of his cloak



about him and went down by the hill trail away from Jerusalem.

It was twilight of the same day when he came near to the village of Emmaus and heard the cheerful barking of the dogs and the lowing of the cattle at the byres. There was a good spring smell of tillage in the inlets of the hills and the cry of the night-jar shaken out over the stony places in a shrill fine spray of sound. Half an hour from the village he came upon two who had followed him up to Jerusalem in the beginning of Passover, and as they walked they reasoned together concerning the things that had come to pass there. When he had entered into conversation he saw that



they were sad, and inquired of them the reason for it; and they, taking him for a stranger, told him how but a short time since there had gone a man up to Jerusalem with a great company, preaching the Kingdom of Heaven at hand, and what had been done to him by the authorities.

“But,” said they, “we trusted it had been he should redeem Israel.”

“O slow of heart,” cried he, “that you believe not all that the prophets have spoken!”

All day as he had come, against the pangs of his torn body, his spirit had beat up toward God with the rhythm of his walking, calling on Power by all the names of Jehovah until he went veiled



in it as in a cloud, which now, by the mere added effort of communication, burst into splendor. But a few days since he had walked up to Jerusalem, battling, in the midst of the presages of betrayal and disaster, with the incomplete revelation of Messiahship. This morning waking at once to a knowledge of the practical defeat and to a new and extraordinary security of Divine continuance, he had felt his way, like a true Hebrew, back through the maze of intimations by the words of the Prophets; starlighted sayings shot like meteors across the dark of Israel's history. They lit far inward past the shames and consternations of the crucifixion.

This, then, was the Kingdom; not the



overthrow of one form by another, but the flux of all forms, empires, pomps, societies, in the eternal facts of existence . . . the redemption of life from the bondage of Things. He was dead and was alive again.

How indeed was a Messiahship to prove its divine origin by merely setting up in the room of thrones and principalities? Say rather, the last word as to the futility of the Kingdoms of the world was pronounced when they wrecked themselves against his immortal quality.

As he held up the events of the last few days to the familiar scriptures, new meanings came out in them like secret writing held before a flame, and as he talked the hearts of his companions burned within



them. As they drew near to their house the speaker made as if he would have gone further, but they urged that he should come in to supper, for the way was hard and the dark had fallen. So as they sat at table, still talking, the mistress of the house set food before them and a little oil-fed lamp. Then the guest put back the hood from his head and stretching forth his hand broke the bread and blessed it, as was his custom, and at once they knew him, but for very fear and astonishment they spoke neither to him nor to one another. As soon as he saw that he was recognized he rose and went forth from them, disappearing in the night.

So little anticipated by his disciples



had been the overthrow of the Mes-
sianic Hope, that the stroke of it fell upon
them like a wolf upon the flock. It
scattered them into nooks and corners,
into the hill places and villages round
about Jerusalem, there to huddle, press-
ing together for relief from consterna-
tion, loath to believe that the miraculous
powers, which had so often served them,
had failed him on his own account, and
wholly unable to accept the whispered
word brought by the women from the
sepulchre. He was gone; power and per-
sonality, his body even risen or spirited
away. All during that day there had
been fearful stealers about the precincts
of the burial place for a view of the de-
serted tomb, stealing back again to whis-



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per and wonder or to handle the dropped grave cloth which lay treasured in the house of Mary.


And now, here were two came back from Emmaus with extraordinary new proof of a resurrection, which when they had heard it neither did they believe. But as some few of them sat together talking of these things, secretly behind shut doors for fear of authorities, he of whom they spoke, advised by that mysterious inward leading that his name passed among them with the old reverent tenderness, sought them out by it, and while they were yet speaking appeared among them. Wounded and pale from his vigils and his pains, the voice of his customary salutation struck terror



through them. There were men there who had unbound him dead, as they believed, from the cross and bestowed him in the tomb!

“Behold my hands and my feet,” he said; “handle me and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones.” But seeing they hung between terror and wonder, he understood that they still supposed that they had seen a spirit. Then he sat at table and asked that he be served with what food they had, the broiled fish and honey in the comb, upon which they had been at supper, talking quietly the while. Seeing him eat they grew secure, and as they began to realize that he was with them in flesh, they were glad.





So by such simple means as they were able to receive he made them to know that he was the very man whom with their own hands they had laid away, in no wise changed or altered; but of the new meaning which his life had taken on by the fact, he spoke very little, for their minds were not opened to it; neither was it at all times and altogether plain to himself.

In the hills beyond the Sea of Tiberias there was a hut built in a secret and solitary place by one of those wild anchorites not infrequently met with in the borders of Judea. None knew of it except perhaps a runaway slave or two, and shepherds who used it at lambing time.



Here in the beginning of his ministry he had drawn apart for seasons of prayer and meditation, that the Word might be plain to him; here, then, he remained resting of God, subsisting in the body by what the hills afforded him and by the gifts of a few poor followers who had their homes hereabout, as yet scarcely apprised of the tragic termination of his mission to Jerusalem. Here he saw the passing of the rains, and flowers come out, flame like, on low piney shrubs; wandering shepherds went by him with their new-washed flocks, and whiter clouds led flockwise in the draws between the hills. . . . By all these things knowledge flowed into him.

He saw with chastening how it was



that he, so near at all times to the Divine mind, should suffer these things. Lying so close there, as a child to its parent, he had been pushed off the better to measure its reach and fullness. He had clung to that breast which in his ministry had nourished him, until torn from it by betrayals, mockings, tortures of his body, he had dropped despairingly into the gulf of death, and lo, he was fallen into the lap of God! "The Kingdom of Heaven is in the midst of you," he had said to his disciples, and now suddenly he had discovered it in the midst of himself! this profound inward clutch upon Being, from which not the breaking of his body could divide him.


Here in the weakness of shock and



wounds, much that had perplexed him in his own life, the fullness of Power straining at his human imitations, came out clearly like the contour of a coast at ebb, but it left him more than ever groping for that communicating touch by which the gained knowledge could be made serviceable to men.

“As my father hath sent me,” he had said to his disciples when his new-found resistance to wounding and the malice of men was at flood, “even so I send you.” Now as his body frailed before the inundation of revelation, he yearned for Peter and that John whom he had loved, all the company of humble folk who had heard him gladly, following up to Jerusalem trustfully as the great bands of





sheep that passed him almost daily, roving the Galilean hills at the heels of the shepherd.

How was he to reach them now, scattered and leaderless, with the significance of his persistence in the body which he accepted at its humanest interpretation. Lying close in the cover of the hills he sent out his thoughts in a strong cry toward his best loved disciples, and Peter and John and the others picking up again the dropped thread of their humble avocations about Gennesareth, heard him. They heard him inwardly, but read it so humanly awry that they made excuse to one another that they went a fishing. They entered into the fishing boats and all night, though they caught nothing,



they beat toward the coast where the cry was; and when it was early light they heard his very voice calling to them that they should cast in their net on the side where he had seen the silver schools floating under the morning mist. When Peter knew the voice he girt on his fisher's coat and came ashore through the shallows, for they were close in, and he had the quickest faith of all the twelve.

Then the others came in with the nets full to breaking, and found that he had made a fire, for the nights along the lake borders were chill, and prepared bread. So they took fish and broiled it and broke their fast together as they had done so many times before when in the beginning of his ministry he had often no other



food than the shared bread of the working people. The naturalness of the morning meal restored to them a little of their former reverent familiarity, and served as the medium by which he undertook to lay upon them the obligation of the gospel which he could now no more in this frame and presence preach about the world.

Of this he seems to have been certain. Daily as he reached inward on great tides of prayer for the word born of his late experience, he was aware of being carried so far out of his wracked body that it was inevitable that he should finally leave it there tumbled like weed along the shore of Things. Beyond that episode lay the full light for which he



panted more than a hart for the waterbrook.

He had known, evidently, how his visit to Jerusalem must terminate, he seems now to have understood that his further usefulness must wait upon the dropping off of the tortured frame which he had brought up through the tomb with him, but he missed knowing how to convey to the remnant of his disciples, who came together about him in the hills, the spiritual values of his return.

He failed, perhaps, because he was not himself yet sure that it might not come that way, to rid them of the expectation of Jewish Autonomy; he was concerned, as always, with the preaching of his Word, rather than what came of it. On



this morning the flocks rounding the lake fronting hills furnished the figure of his admonition.

“Feed my sheep,” he said to Peter, and again; and then “Feed my lambs.” One thing he had not brought back out of the tomb with him was the fear by which his church was afterward corrupted, that the Truth of God could not be trusted to do its Perfect Work in man.

On a mountain in a place appointed for them, he flamed forth for the last time, with that message, the faint, mis-read recollection of which as it lay in the minds of his disciples has become the ultimate hope of all our science and all untoward questionings — the assurance of the supremacy of Spirit. What they



got from it chiefly was the certainty of the continuance of his personal power. It was the green bough preserved to them among the desolating blasts of human experience. "For, lo, I am with you always," he said, "even to the end of the world."

That they did not treasure more these last words, preserve them with that meticulous accuracy for which that body of religionists, from whom they were shorn by the sword of Christ's teaching, were notable, was due in part to their having no apparent belief in this being the last. They had seen him in the flesh, they expected to see him in the flesh again. Nothing else could account for the boldness with which these timid and easily



shaken peasant souls faced so soon again the possibility of persecution and death in that Jerusalem whither he had told them to await the confirming visitation of the Spirit. They faced it. They went, while the city still rang with the story of his defeat, to confirm his triumph; they preached what they had known and seen.

It seems likely, then, that on that last occasion when he went with them a little way on the road toward Jerusalem, they had no notion that it was the last they should see of him in the body. They said unto him, "Lord, dost thou at this time restore the Kingdom to Israel?"

"It is not for you," said he, "to know times and seasons." In his own time he should come again and in no other



guise than Counsellor and Friend. When he had blessed them they saw him pass up the hill trail toward his chosen place and the mountain mists receive him.

Afterward in the long time when they expected him in vain, they said, in the manner of speaking of that country, that he had ascended to Heaven, so that long afterward it came to be reported that they had seen him ascending there in the company of clouds of angels. But so long as they lived who had seen him, they looked out for him every day . . . any knock at the door . . . any solitary figure on the hill paths about Bethany. . . . For they had laid him in the tomb, and he had come to them in the very flesh.



MAR 1 2 1935

